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National Endowment for the Arts: News Articles (1980): News Article 11

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AC - FYD from Christian Science Monitor. - WB
(Senator has copy)

Roscoe Drummond

Boosting the arts

Washington

Here is some news which might surprise you: Federal programs aren't all fumbling failures.

Some are working well and I want to report on one which is working sensationally well.

The nation is coming alive in the arts. More and diverse talent is emerging everywhere. More Americans are enriching their lives by viewing the arts and participating in them. There is mounting patronage of the arts by those who are helping to expand burgeoning creativity in music, in theaters, in the dance, in museums — in every form of artistic expression.

While US industry is having trouble recapturing its productivity, the nation's arts and artists are beginning to abound with new productivity.

The evidence is rather breathtaking. Here are examples of the growth of our cultural institutions:

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	1965	TODAY
Professional symphony orchestras	58	144
Professional opera companies	27	65
Large professional theaters	12	70
Small professional theaters	10	200
Professional dance companies	37	200
Museums (art, science, history)	1,700	1,800
Media arts centers	1	15
Artists, exhibit spaces	0	200
State arts agencies	7	56

Obviously no one person and no single force is animating this remarkable birth of the arts. But the objective fact is that it all began following the creation, by a significantly bipartisan act of Congress, of the National Endowment for the Arts. It started with a vision of a few members of Congress led by Sen. Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island with the assistance of Livingston L. Biddle Jr., who drafted some very wise legislation. Joining with Senator Pell in this initiative were Sen.



By Larry Davis

Cellist rehearses in concert hall; federal funding for the arts has kept pace 'allegro'

Jacob Javits of New York, Rep. John Brademas of Indiana, Rep. Sidney R. Yates of Illinois, and Rep. Frank Thompson of New Jersey.

And, now, after 15 years of stimulating new artistic enterprises and strengthening established artistic institutions, the vision has become reality.

American arts and American artists are today widely acclaimed internationally and the United States is recognized as one of the most creative art centers in the world.

The national endowment has imaginatively nourished this achievement. Individual citizens in the states, in the communities, and in private enterprise have responded.

That was the concept which Mr. Biddle brought to the endowment when he shaped the legislation, and that is the concept he has put into practice as its deputy chairman in 1966 and as its chairman since 1977 when he was appointed by President Carter.

He never allowed the endowment to be a dictator of the arts. The wisdom of a federal

agency being run on such a decentralized democratic basis is to be found in its fruit.

Corporations and businesses were contributing to the arts a total of \$22 million a year in 1966. Now they are contributing more than \$400 million a year.

Support from the states amounted to \$4 million in 1966. Now it is more than \$97 million annually.

Community arts councils have mushroomed from the 150 of 15 years ago to 2,000 today.

For every dollar the endowment provides to help fund the arts, it generates \$3 to \$4 additional money. Its own budget was \$2.5 million at the start; last year Congress ungrudgingly appropriated \$154.4 million.

I would testify that this mature national endowment is no boondoggle.

The public has responded. The Metropolitan Opera performances are now viewed by millions on public television. Audiences are steadily growing for the theater, for orchestras, and for dance throughout the country.

Livingston Biddle has been of the arts and surrounded by the arts all his adult life. He is a novelist with two best-sellers to his credit. He has been chairman and professor in the arts department of Fordham University. He has legislative and administrative experience. He is married to Catharine Baart Biddle, an accomplished painter and teacher of the visual arts whose close association with her husband's work has been no small boon.

The patient, creative work of the national endowment is a notable achievement — and a promise of more to come. It is needed. There is more to be done. Whoever may be the next president, it is imperative that this forward thrust be maintained, for the health of the arts bears directly upon the health of our society.

"Remember," Mr. Biddle has remarked, "that when a society emphasizes the arts, it emphasizes the value of the individual, of individuality. Where the arts flourish, so does that consummate political system centered on the individual — democracy."